

May 21, 2021

RE: SB5514

Dear Co-Chairs and Members of the Oregon Joint Ways and Means Committee:

We are writing to you as members of the [Community Budget Review Committee \(CBRC\)](#) for Portland Public Schools. We are charged with assisting the Board of Directors with the annual budgeting process. We are parents, community members, and professionals who are intimately familiar with the budgeting process. We recently learned that Oregon's Legislature is planning to use one-time Federal relief dollars as an excuse to underfund K-12 education at the state level. ***The CBRC finds this misuse of Federal relief funds misguided and detrimental to students, families, and communities.***

In March, the Co-Chairs of the Joint Ways and Means Committee proposed a K-12 education budget of \$9.1 billion at the biennium level, rather than the \$9.6 billion that would simply maintain the current level of state education service, rationalizing that the State can offset the \$500 million shortfall by leveraging one-time Federal relief funds made available through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, 2020 (CARES Act). Governor Brown agreed to a school's budget of \$9.3 billion which is far less than needed to simply maintain current service levels. ***All three amounts, \$9.1B, \$9.3B, and \$9.6B, would underfund Oregon schools.***

It is true that Federal relief funds will add money to K-12 education in Oregon. The CARES act will provide roughly \$121 million, the CRRS act will add roughly \$500 million, and the ESSER/ARP plan will add roughly \$1.1 billion dollars to Oregon. These one-time funds are meant to *supplement* the current education funding levels for Oregon and are expected to be used over the next 1-3 years. However, the Oregon Legislature is proposing to use these funds to offset increased State spending on K-12 education and to divert those funds elsewhere. [Federal guidelines](#) have explicitly said that ARP ESSER, ESSER I, ESSER II, GEER I, GEER II, and EANS funds are meant to expand resources for K-12 and postsecondary schools and students, not to replace existing State commitments to K-12 and postsecondary education. ***But the Oregon Legislature is not following these Federal relief fund guidelines, instead choosing to divert much-needed resources away from Oregon schools and students.***

This past year has been one of unprecedented challenge. Covid-19 has impacted the lives of all Oregonians, particularly students, who have endured more than a year of disruption to in-person learning. Students, families, and educators have performed heroic acts to adapt and even thrive amidst these disruptions, which have left their mark on our communities in the form of uneven access to learning, lost instructional time, and disengagement and social isolation. ***Further, impacts on learners across the state are not evenly distributed given disparate access to technology and supplemental resources to support learning in a virtual environment.***

Recovery is not a one-time act - it will require years of consistent and sufficient funding from both the State and Federal governments. We need to expand investment in strategies such as high dosage tutoring, summer and extended learning programs, and school-based mental health and wellness support. We are grateful for the additional \$250 million that Oregon

lawmakers have made available to support summer learning and childcare - but this reflects a one-time, targeted investment versus a sustained, year-over-year commitment to adequately funding our public schools. We are facing a once in a generation opportunity to invest in our schools, students, and communities. ***At this critical time, the Oregon Legislature should be looking to spend more money on education, not less. Oregon legislators need to step up to the plate and fulfill its fiscal responsibility to students.***

On May 19, 2021 revenue forecasts showed that the Oregon financial situation is far better than anticipated. House Speaker Kotek called the forecast “stunning” while Senate President Courtney labeled it “unbelievable”. Simply put, there is roughly \$1B more available than previously thought for the Oregon Legislature to consider. Fortunately, the State has had a model for K-12 education spending on its website for nearly 20 years. The Quality Education Model (QEM) is a fixture on the Oregon.gov website and lays out the funding level necessary to fully fund Oregon students. ***For the 2021-2023 biennium, the commission tasked with setting the Oregon QEM funding level arrived at \$9.994B. This is the amount that the Oregon Legislature should be looking to fund K-12 education.***

Oregon ranks in the bottom 33% of states in terms of K-12 education funding. Oregon students deserve better. They should not be shortchanged by state lawmakers looking to use Federal relief dollars to divert State education dollars elsewhere. Now is the time for lawmakers to step up and help Oregon families and Oregon students. The Oregon Legislature should take the lead from the Federal government and rise to the occasion. ***The Oregon Legislature should fund K-12 education at its own QEM level of \$9.994B over the next biennium and use the Federal stimulus education funds to supplement that amount.***

Respectfully Submitted,

PPS CBRC Members:

Sara Kerr, Co-Chair
Judah McAuley, Co-Chair
Parker Myrus, Co-Vice Chair and Student Representative
Irina Phillips, Co-Vice Chair
Tastonga Davis
Roger Kirchner
Brad Nelson
Leesha Posey
Jennifer Samuels
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Lisa Selman
Renee Watson
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